

ADJUSTABLE, PROTECTIVE AND DECORATIVE
HEARTH GUARD

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Cross-Reference to Related Application

This application is a continuation-in-part of copending
application U.S. Serial No. 10/423,437, filed April 25, 2003.

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates in general to fireplace
safety and hearth guards. Specifically, the present invention
provides an adjustable protective guard for a raised hearth.

Description of the Related Art

Fireplaces are common in households around the world. However, fireplaces with raised hearths can present serious hazards from trips and falls. This is most typically a concern when young
5 children are present. Also, fireplaces can create a decorating challenge, as changing the appearance of the fireplace is not easily accomplished. Solutions for these problems have typically required a custom-fit approach because there is not one standard dimension used by the construction industry for fireplace hearths. Raised
10 hearths are generally 10-18 inches high and project forward 10-24 inches, but length can vary greatly.

U.S. Patent No. 5,508,078 discloses a device to guard a corner of a hearth. The device utilizes a flexible material that may be bent into the desired shape. U.S. Patent Nos. 4,903,686,
15 5,058,566, and 5,183,030 protect only the hearth edges.

U.S. Patent No. 4,787,366 teaches a device comprising foam and a fabric cover, but the device does not cover the top surface of the hearth and must be custom fit to an individual fireplace. Additionally, the fabric coverings can not be easily
20 modified. U.S. Patent No. 4,867,135 and U.S. Patent No. 4,865,015

teach a padding that covers all exposed surfaces, but it must be custom fit.

U.S. Patent No. 5,779,318 and U.S. Patent No. 4,922,891 teach rigid support frames. U.S. Patent No. 5,050,583 also discloses
5 a rigid structural support that can provide some flexibility in hearth length.

The inventor has recognized a need in the art for a hearth guard that can be easily adjusted while providing protection from accidents involving a raised hearth and ornamentation for a
10 raised hearth. Specifically, the prior art is lacking in a hearth guard that encompasses adjustability, protection of all sides of the hearth, and interchangeable fabric coverings. The present invention fulfills this long-standing need and desire in the art.

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is directed to a hearth guard to cover a raised hearth comprising a first end section, a second end
20 section and an adjustable center section. Each of the sections is

formed of a cushioning material. The hearth guard also comprises a connecting means to connect the sections and a fastening means.

The present invention also is directed to a method of protectively covering a raised hearth by assembling the hearth guard
5 described herein such that the hearth guard is assembled to securely fit over the exposed surfaces and the edges of the raised hearth thereby protectively covering the raised hearth.

Other and further aspects, features, and advantages of the present invention will be apparent from the following
10 description of the presently preferred embodiments of the invention given for the purpose of disclosure.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

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So that the matter in which the above-recited features, advantages and objects of the invention, as well as others which will become clear, are attained and can be understood in detail, more particular descriptions of the invention briefly summarized above
20 may be had by reference to certain embodiments thereof which are illustrated in the appended drawings. These drawings form a part of

the specification. It is to be noted, however, that the appended drawings illustrate preferred embodiments of the invention and therefore are not to be considered limiting in their scope.

Figure 1 depicts a two-dimensional view of the top, front and side panels of the end sections and means of connecting the end sections.

Figure 2A depicts a center section insert with the top and front panels molded as a single piece to conform to the center of the hearth. Perforations to adjust the length of the center section are also depicted.

Figure 2B depicts a side view of a center section insert with the top and front panels molded as a folded single piece which opens to conform to the center of the hearth.

Figure 2C is a three dimensional view of the hearth guard depicting the insertion of either of the center sections depicted in Figures 2A or 2B.

Figure 2D depicts a graphical representation for adjusting the center insert to fit the hearth.

Figure 2E depicts the assembled and installed hearth guard without a decorative cover.

Figure 3A depicts the attachment of the front decorative cover to one end panel.

Figure 3B depicts the attachment of the top decorative cover.

5 Figure 3C depicts the assembled and installed hearth guard with the decorative covers in place.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

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In one embodiment of the present invention, there is provided a hearth guard to cover a raised hearth comprising a first end section, a second end section, an adjustable center section, where each of the sections comprises a cushioning material, a
15 connecting means to connect the sections, and fastening means.

In one aspect of this embodiment of the hearth guard the first end section and the second end section independently comprise a top panel, a front panel and, optionally, a side panel. Each of the panels may be molded from the cushioning material. A
20 representative example of cushioning material is foam. In this aspect each of the panels is covered, for example, with a cloth

cover. The fastening means may fasten the top covered panel to the front covered panel in each of the end sections. Optionally, the fastening means may further fasten the covered side panel to both the top and front covered panels in the end sections. The fastened covered panels form a structure to encase an end of the raised hearth. In an alternative aspect the first end section and the second end section each comprises a single piece molded from the cushioning material such that the single molded piece forms a structure to encase an end of the raised hearth.

Further to this aspect of this embodiment the adjustable center section comprises a single piece molded from the cushioning material such that the single molded piece may form a structure having a 90 degree angle to encase a center section of the raised hearth. In a related aspect the adjustable center section comprises a single piece having a top panel and a front panel whereby both panels are molded from the cushioning material to fold across an angle juncture formed by the panels, wherein the folded single molded piece unfolds to a structure having a 90 degree angle to encase a center section of the raised hearth. Alternatively, the adjustable center section comprises a top panel and a front panel. Each of the panels may be molded from the cushioning material.

The top and front panels are positioned at a 90 degree angle relative to each other to encase a center section of the raised hearth.

In either of these aspects the center section is adjustable in length. The center section may be perforated at parallel intervals
5 along its width. The perforated segments are easily removed thereby adjusting the length. The adjustable center section also may be cut along a line parallel to its length thereby adjusting length.

In another aspect of this embodiment the hearth guard further comprises a first removable decorative fabric cover and a
10 second removable decorative fabric cover. Each of these adjustable decorative fabric covers has a length at least sufficient to cover the end sections and the center section of the hearth guard. The fastening means may be used to fasten the first and the second fabric covers to the back surface of the end sections of the hearth
15 guard. Additionally, the fastening means may be used to fasten the first fabric cover to the second fabric cover along the length of the hearth guard.

In all aspects of this embodiment the hearth guard may be covered with a fire-resistant coating to increase the safety of the
20 hearth guard. The cushioning material used in all aspects may be foam. Also, the connecting means may be a telescoping slider

mechanism, Velcro, a strap, or a tie-string. Additionally, the connecting means may further comprise a bracket attached thereto to further secure the center section. The fastening means used in all aspects may be by sewing, Velcro, zippers, snaps, tie strings or
5 buttons. Optionally, the fastening means may be used to anchor the end sections to the raised hearth.

In another embodiment of the present invention there is provided a method of protectively covering a raised hearth comprising the step of assembling the hearth guard described herein
10 whereby the hearth guard is assembled to securely fit over the exposed surfaces and the edges of the raised hearth thereby protectively covering the raised hearth. In all aspects of this embodiment the hearth guard, the materials comprising the hearth guard, the connecting means and the fastening means are as
15 described *supra*.

In an aspect of this embodiment the assembling of the hearth guard comprises the steps of placing a first end section of the hearth guard onto a first end of the raised hearth and placing a second end section of the hearth guard onto a second end of the
20 raised hearth. Both the first and second end sections are in a covering relationship to the raised hearth. The first and second end

sections are connected via the connecting means which holds the first and second end sections securely against the raised hearth. The center section of the hearth guard is placed between the first and the second end sections. The center section is adjusted in
5 length to fit securely between the first and the second end sections thereby being in a covering relationship to the raised hearth. The connecting means connects the center section to the first end section and to the second end.

Further to this aspect positioning the center section of
10 the hearth guard may comprise the step of placing a single molded piece having a permanent 90 degree bend over a center section of the raised hearth. In a related aspect positioning the center section of the hearth guard may comprise the steps of unfolding a top panel from a front panel or vice versa, both panels comprising a single
15 molded piece of the center section, to form a single molded piece having a 90 degree bend at a juncture of the panels and placing the unfolded single molded piece over a center section of the raised hearth. In an alternative aspect positioning the center section of the hearth guard may comprise the steps of placing a top panel
20 comprising the center section onto a top center surface of the raised hearth and placing a front panel comprising the center

section onto a front center surface of the raised hearth, whereby a top edge of the front panel is in contact with and juxtaposed at a 90 degree angle to a front edge of the top panel.

Further to this aspect in considering the covering step,
5 the hearth guard may be covered with a removable decorative fabric. A first end of a first length of fabric may be fastened to a front panel or, if a first end of the raised hearth comprises a corner, to a surface of a side panel comprising the first end section via the fastening means. The first length of fabric is extended across the
10 front surface of the hearth guard and, if the second end of the raised hearth comprises a corner, a side panel of the second end section. The fastening means may be used to fasten the second end of the first length of fabric either to a surface of the front panel or to a surface of the second side panel. The second fabric end is
15 fastened at a position to securely and completely cover the front surface and, if comprising the second end section, the side panel thereof.

A first end of a second length of fabric also may be fastened to a surface of the top panel comprising said first end
20 section or to the surface of the side panel, if the side panel comprises the first side panel via the fastening means. The second

length of fabric is extended across the top surface of the hearth guard and if comprising said second end section, the side panel thereof. The fastening means may be used to fasten the second end of the second length of fabric to either a surface of the top panel or to a surface of the side panel comprising the second end section. As with the first length of fabric, the second fabric end is fastened at a position to securely and completely cover the top surface and, if comprising the second end section, the side panel thereof.

The fastening means further may be used to fasten the top edge of the first fabric length to a front edge of the second fabric length. Optionally, the fastening means may be used to fasten the bottom edge of the first fabric length to the front surface of the hearth guard. Again, optionally, the fastening means also may fasten the back edge of the second fabric length to the top surface of the hearth guard.

Provided herein is an adjustable, protective, and ornamental guard for a raised hearth. The hearth guard comprises separate sections and is adjustable. Therefore, the hearth guard can be installed on any sized raised hearth without customization. The hearth guard also offers a padded surface on the top, sides and

front of the hearth thereby minimizing the risk of and providing excellent protection against injury from falls.

Furthermore, the hearth guard may be easily removed and does not require any modification to the fireplace hearth. Thus, 5 the components and coverings comprising the hearth guard can be easily cleaned. Additionally, a fire-resistant coating may be applied to any of the components or covers comprising the hearth guard. The ability to remove and to replace fabric coverings quickly provides broad decorating flexibility. The fabric coverings can be 10 fastened to the hearth guard in a manner to accommodate any hearth length.

A raised hearth may have two end sections and a center section. The two end sections may independently comprise a coverable corner end having a raised top surface, a front and a side 15 surface or comprise a coverable end with only a raised top surface and a front surface. The coverable center section of the raised hearth comprises the remaining section of the hearth between the end sections and has a raised top surface and a front surface.

Thus, the hearth guard comprises three sections, two 20 end sections and a center section each conformed to or conformable to the comparable section of the raised hearth.

Furthermore, each of the end sections of the hearth guard may comprise a top, a front and, optionally, a side panel made of a cushioning material such as foam. A cushioning material other than foam also may be utilized such as quilt batting. The top, front and
5 side panels are encased in a covering material, e.g., fabric or skinned foam, and fastened in such a way as to protectively cover one corner or one end, the edges, and flat surfaces of one end of the hearth. The panel coverings may be fastened together by such means as sewing, Velcro, zippers, or other fastening means. The
10 second end section comprising identically covered panels is placed on the opposite end of the hearth.

Alternatively, a single piece of foam or other cushioning material may be molded to form an end section. As previously described the molded end sections protectively cover one corner or
15 one end, the edges, and flat surfaces of one end of the hearth when positioned. Optionally, the end sections in any form may be anchored to the hearth using a fastening means such as snaps, screws, or other attachment device.

The center section may comprise a single piece of
20 cushioning material permanently molded to form a 90 degree angle to conform to a hearth. Alternatively, the center section may

comprise a single piece of cushioning material such that a top panel and a front panel are folded to form an angle juncture of 0 degrees between the two panels to form a flat structure. The panels are opened to conform to the 90 degree angle of the center of the
5 hearth as with the permanently molded center section. The cushioning material may be, although not limited to, a foam material. It is particularly contemplated that a foam material is conducive for folding a foldable center section. A foldable center section provides an improvement over a permanently molded center
10 section in ease of shipping, of storage and of manipulation prior to installation of the hearth guard.

Alternatively, the center section may comprise two separate panels. As previously described, the two center panels may comprise a cushioning material such as foam. A first top center
15 panel is positioned on the top surface of the hearth between the top panels comprising the first and second end sections and secured thereto. A second front center panel is positioned along the front surface of the hearth between the front panels comprising the first and second end sections and secured thereto. As with a foldable
20 center section, a center section comprising two separate panels also is more easily shipped and stored than a permanently molded center

section. Although, manipulating of either of the single pieced center sections onto a hearth may be easier for some individuals installing such a hearth guard, using two separate panels also provides an easily utilized alternative.

5 The center section, as either a single piece or two pieces, is sized to an appropriate length and placed between the end sections. For example, the center section may be perforated at intervals along the width of the section. One or more segments may be removed until the center section is the desired length. When
10 positioned between the end sections, the center section with the end sections provides a cushioning framework that extends across the entire horizontal and vertical length of the hearth to provide complete protection.

 The two end sections and the center section are
15 connected by a connecting means such as a telescoping slider mechanism, Velcro, or other connecting device. The top panel and front panel of one end section may comprise connectable components fastened thereto while the top panel and front panel of the other end section may comprise the connecting components
20 fastened thereto. Engaging the components provides for a secure fit of the hearth guard to the hearth. Additionally, a bracket or similar

securing means may be secured to the connecting means to further secure the center section. It is contemplated that the end sections may comprise connecting means located at other points on the panels comprising the end sections.

5 The assembled framework may be covered with a decorative fabric cover. The top surface and the front surface of the assembled framework are covered separately. One end of the fabric cover is fastened via the fastening means to the front panel or to the side panel, if the raised hearth has a corner at this end, of one
10 of the end sections. The second end of the fabric is fastened to the opposite end section at the appropriate front or side panel if the raised hearth has a corner at the second end. The fabric cover may be fastened along the front surface or the back surface of the front panel cover or side panel cover to cover the entire length of the
15 hearth including the side if the raised hearth has one or two open sides. Thus, the decorative fabric cover is adjustable in length. Optionally, the bottom edge of the fabric cover may be fastened to the back surface of the front panel covers.

 A second decorative fabric cover is fastened by one end
20 to a surface of the top panel of the first end section and extends across the top surface of the hearth guard. A second end of this

fabric cover also is fastened to a surface of the second top panel or to a surface of a second side panel if the raised hearth has a corner at the second end. The fastening means may be those means previously described. This provides an adjustable fabric cover length as described above. The front and the top fabric covers meet at approximately the front edge of the hearth and are fastened together via the fastening means. Optionally, the back edge of the fabric cover may be fastened to the back surface of the top panel covers.

As described below, the invention provides a number of advantages and uses, however such advantages and uses are not limited by such description. Embodiments of the present invention are better illustrated with reference to the Figures, however, such reference is not meant to limit the present invention in any fashion. The embodiments and variations described in detail herein are to be interpreted by the appended claims and equivalents thereof.

Figure 1 depicts a two-dimensional view of two end sections with attachment means of the hearth guard. A first end section 10 and a second end section 20 each comprise three rectangular panels encased in a covering material (not shown), such as fabric or foam skin. Each of a top panel 11,21, a front panel

12,22 and a side panel 13,23 is connected via a fastening means (not shown) to the other two panels along two edges of each panel. The panels comprise a cushioning material, e.g., a foam material such as, but not limited to, a polyurethane foam.

- 5 The coverings on the panels 11,12,13,21,22,23 may be sewn together or attached by Velcro, zippers, or other fastening means. The top panel 11 of the first end section 10 has a length L1 and the top panel 21 of the second end section 20 has a length L2 such that the sum of L1 and L2 is less than the length L of the hearth.
- 10 When the fastening means has fastened the panels in an end section, the front surface of each panel is at 90 degrees with respect to the front surfaces of the other two panels. Each of the assembled three-panel end sections 10,20 fits over and around one corner of the hearth (not shown) to cover it.
- 15 Although the raised hearth depicted in Figure 1 comprises two corner sections 10,20, an end section of a hearth guard for a raised hearth having one or two end sections without corners can be assembled as described without the step of fastening the side panels 13,23. The two-panel end section(s) simply fits
- 20 over and covers the top and front surfaces of the raised hearth.

The top panels 11,21 and front panels 12,22 of each end section 10,20 further comprise a connecting means 30a,b,c to pull or to draw each end section 10,20 directionally toward the other along planes parallel to the top and front surfaces of the hearth. Such a connecting means 30a,b,c allows both the top 11,21 and front panels 12,22 of both end sections 10,20 to be pulled tightly together thereby keeping the end sections 10,20 securely fitted to the corners of the hearth (not shown). The top panels 11,21 may require more than one of such connecting means 30a,b to insure that the top panels 11,21 are held together uniformly across the surfaces.

The top panel 11 and the front panel 12 of a first end section 10 each may comprise one or more connectable components (not shown) such as, although not limited to, a telescoping slider, a long piece of Velcro, a strap, tie-string, or other such connectable device, which attaches to a front or back surface of the top 11 and front 12 panels. The top panel 21 and the front panel 22 of the second end section 20 comprise one or more connection components (not shown) to which the connectable components connect, such as, although not limited to, a receiver for the slider, a Velcro strip, or a buckle on the surface of the top panel

or other connecting component. The connectable components and the corresponding connection components comprise the connecting means 30a,b,c. When the components of the connecting means 30a,b,c are engaged the first and second end sections 10,20 may
5 be pulled tightly together.

Figure 2A depicts a center section 40 of the hearth guard. The center section 40 comprises a single piece 41 molded to have a permanent 90 degree bend across an adjustable length L3 of the single piece 41.

10 Figure 2B depicts an alternative center section 46 of the hearth guard. The center section 46 comprises a single piece 47 having a top panel 48a and a front panel 48b molded to fold to a 0 degree bend across an adjustable length L3 when not in use, as depicted in Figure 2A (not shown in Figure 2B) of the single piece
15 47. The panels 48a,b can unfold through an arc A to form the single piece 47 with a 90 degree bend at L3 (not shown).

With continued reference to Figures 1 and 2A-2B, Figure 2C depicts the placement of the center section 40. Although not depicted, placement of the center section 46, after unfolding single
20 piece 46, may be placed identically as depicted with center section 40. When the length L3 is properly adjusted the molded single panel

41 fits securely between the first 10 and second 20 end sections over the top and front surfaces of the hearth (not shown). The length L3 of the center section 40 or, when used, center section 46 is selected so that the sum of lengths L1, L2 and L3 equal the length L of the hearth thereby completely covering the top, front and side surfaces of the hearth. The center section 40 and of alternative center section 46 may be a cushioning material such as foam.

As depicted in Figure 2D and with continued reference to Figures 2A and 2C, the center section 40 may be perforated at intervals such as at, but not limited to, 42a,42b along the width of the single molded panel 41 such that segment(s) 43 of the panel 41 may be easily removed to form a center section 40 with top and front panels 44a,b of an appropriate length L3. The unused segment(s) 43 are easily discarded. The molded single panel 41 comprising 44a,b is secured into place by the connecting means 30a,b,c connecting the first 10 and second 20 end sections to hold them securely in place. Thus, when the center section 40 comprising 44a,b of molded panel 41 is positioned on the raised hearth, the tightening action of the straps or other connecting means 30a,b,c drawing the top 11,21 and front 21,22 panels of the two end sections 10,20 toward each other also serves to hold

the center section 40 comprising 44a,b of molded panel 41 securely between the end sections 10,20. Again, the center section 46 described in Figure 2B may be perforated and adjustable in length as described for center section 40.

5 Figure 2E, with continued reference to Figure 2D, depicts the assembled hearth guard 50 with end sections 10,20 and center section 44a,b installed on a raised hearth 105 of a fireplace 100 to cover all surfaces, corners and edges of the raised hearth. The hearth guard 50 is shown installed without a decorative cover.

10 Again, it is contemplated that the center section 46, described in Figure 2B, may be adjusted in length, as described for center section 40, and positioned, as described with center section 44a,b depicted in Figure 2D, to form an assembled hearth guard 50 with end sections 10,20.

15 Figure 3A depicts a decorative fabric cover 60 fastened to the front surface 70 of the assembled hearth guard. A first end 61 of a fabric cover 60 is fastened to the back surface of the side panel 13 covering (not shown) comprising the first end section 10 by a fastening means (not shown). The fastening means may be

20 velcro, buttons, a tie-string or other fastening means. The fabric cover 60 extends along the front surface 70 comprising front

panels 12,44b,22 of the hearth guard to the side panel 23 comprising the second end section 20 thereby covering the front surface 70. A second end 62 of the fabric cover 60 is fastened to the front surface or to the back surface of the second side panel 23 covering (not shown) via the fastening means 80. In this manner, the fabric cover 60 may be attached as necessary to fit the length of the hearth. Optionally, the fabric cover 60 may be wrapped around the bottom edges of the front panels 12,44b,22 comprising the front surface 70 and fastened to the back surfaces of the front panels 12,44b,22 covers via the fastening means (not shown) to reduce fabric slippage. Again, although not depicted in Figure 3A, if one or both of the end sections do not require a side panel the fabric cover may be fastened to the front or back surface of the appropriate front panel. Furthermore, although not depicted, the decorative fabric cover also may cover the foldable front panel 48b of center section 46 when used in the assembled hearth guard 50.

Figure 3B depicts how a decorative fabric cover 60 is fastened to the top surface 90 of the assembled hearth guard. A first end 61 of a fabric cover 60 is fastened to the back surface of the side panel 13 covering 14 comprising the first end section 10 by a fastening means 80 as disclosed for the front panels

12,44b,22. The fabric cover 60 extends along the top surface comprising panels 11,44a,21 of the hearth guard to the side panel (not shown) comprising the second end section (not shown). The fabric cover 60 wraps under the second side panel and fastens to the covering on the back surface of the second top panel or to the covering on the back surface of the second side panel via the fastening means (not shown). Furthermore, although not depicted, the decorative fabric cover also may cover the foldable top panel 48a of center section 46 when used in the assembled hearth guard 50.

The fastening position may be determined by the length L of the hearth in comparison to the length of the fabric cover 60. Optionally, as similarly described, the fabric cover 60 may be wrapped around the back edges of the top panels and fastened to the back surfaces of the top panel coverings via the fastening means to reduce fabric slippage (not shown). As with Figure 3A and not depicted in Figure 3B, if one or both of the end sections do not require a side panel the fabric cover 60 may be fastened to the front or back surface coverings of the appropriate top panel.

Figure 3C depicts the assembled hearth guard installed on a raised hearth 105 of a fireplace 100. The hearth guard is

shown installed with a decorative fabric cover 60 in place to cover all surfaces, corners and edges of the hearth guard. The front edge of the top fabric cover and the top edge of the front fabric cover meet at approximately the front edge of the hearth. The front and top edges are fastened together by a fastening means 80 such as Velcro, buttons, snaps, or other fastening means as previously described.

One skilled in the art will readily appreciate that the present invention is well adapted to carry out the objects and obtain the ends and advantages mentioned, as well as those inherent therein. The present examples along with the methods, procedures, treatments, molecules, and specific compounds described herein are presently representative of preferred embodiments, are exemplary, and are not intended as limitations on the scope of the invention. Changes therein and other uses will occur to those skilled in the art which are encompassed within the spirit of the invention as defined by the scope of the claims.